



WILDLIFE NETWORK
T A S M A N I A

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION MENTORING GUIDELINES

Guidelines for mentors and mentees engaged in the
rehabilitation and release of injured and orphaned wildlife



SUPPORTED BY

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Government

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is the act of a more experienced person (the 'mentor'), advising, guiding and supporting a less experienced person (the 'mentee') to enable them to achieve their goals.

Why is Mentoring Important?

In the wildlife rehabilitation sector, mentors play a vital role in the training, continuous development and ongoing engagement of less experienced wildlife rehabilitators.

Having completed the basic training, the new rehabilitator will benefit greatly from applying their newfound skills and knowledge in a safe, supported environment. The mentor helps to create this environment through supervision and the transfer of knowledge gained through exposure to a number of rehabilitation scenarios.

An effective mentor will form a bond with their mentee based on trust and a mutual understanding of each other's strengths and limitations. The mentor will guide the less experienced rehabilitator through every aspect of the rehabilitation process, from preparing for the arrival of a new animal into care, all the way through to a successful release.

For the mentor, the welfare of both the animal and the mentee is of paramount importance. Through positive reinforcement and effective two-way communication, the mentor helps their less experienced mentee to stay engaged despite challenges and setbacks.

For Novice and Intermediate Rehabilitators, the mentor relationship creates:

- Opportunities to discuss issues in a constructive, non-judgmental way
- Confidence through self-appraisal based on open and honest feedback
- Opportunities to broaden their species-specific knowledge
- Opportunities to connect with the broader network of rehabilitation carers
- A supported and more positive experience of wildlife rehabilitation
- Better outcomes for the wildlife in their care.

For Advanced Rehabilitators, becoming a mentor creates opportunities to:

- Consolidate their experience through coaching and knowledge transfer
- Broaden their impact on wildlife through the empowerment and upskilling of others
- Develop their interpersonal and problem solving skills
- Contribute to the sustainability of the wildlife rehabilitation sector in Tasmania.

What's Involved in Mentoring?

An effective mentor-mentee relationship involves both parties taking a proactive stance. Mentors must be actively and enthusiastically engaged in the relationship to ensure that their mentee is provided with the support and guidance needed to achieve competence in the rehabilitation of their chosen species.

Specifically, a mentor should:

- Visit the new rehabilitator and joey in person to ensure they are applying the correct rehabilitation techniques; and
- Establish an effective communication and reporting regime to ensure that the joey is thriving.

Mentors must possess a thorough understanding of the 'basics' of wildlife rehabilitation and be able to communicate these principles effectively. For example, when a new rehabilitator is struggling to bottle feed a new orphan, the mentor must be able to demonstrate and explain bottle feeding techniques that have become second nature (e.g. subtle differences in hand position, the position of the joey, the temperature of the milk, etc.).

Likewise and particularly during the formative stages of their development as rehabilitators, the mentee should be empowered to contact their mentor with questions and concerns as they arise. Specifically, the mentee must:

- Notify their mentor of any significant changes to the health status of their joey; and
- Seek guidance from their mentor in areas where they do not yet feel confident or sufficiently experienced to act independently.

What Makes an Effective Wildlife Mentor?

Ideally a mentor should have the following:



SKILLS

- Demonstrated competence in the skills that underpin wildlife rehabilitation (initial assessment, hydration, feeding, husbandry, enrichment, etc.)
- Well-developed communication and interpersonal skills
- The ability to facilitate learning through effective one-on-one coaching
- The capacity to adapt to different learning styles
- The capacity to interpret carer records (data and trends) and develop an appropriate response, including intervention or referral for veterinary treatment
- The ability to actively listen and provide constructive feedback in a timely manner.



PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

- A passion for animal welfare and wildlife rehabilitation
- Willingness to share experience and devote time to the mentee
- An unwavering commitment to establishing high standards of care in rehabilitation and release
- A genuine desire to form relationships based on mutual respect and trust
- A commitment to continuous improvement and lifelong learning.



EXPERIENCE

- Extensive training and/or years of experience in the rehabilitation of the mentee's chosen species
- Exposure to a broad range of rehabilitation scenarios and outcomes including:
- ✓ Caring for sick and injured animals, including those under a course of veterinary treatment
- ✓ Dealing with complications arising during the rehabilitation process (e.g. failure to thrive, gastrointestinal upset, dehydration, etc.)
- ✓ Rehabilitation and release of animals arriving into care at all life stages.



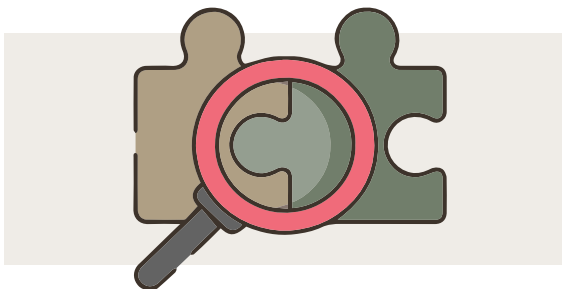
Beginning a Mentoring Relationship

At the beginning of the mentoring relationship, mentors and their mentees should meet to clearly define each other's needs and expectations of the relationship. This should include:

- A discussion about the mentee's preferred learning style and any barriers to learning
- A commitment to an open and honest relationship based on mutual respect and trust
- Exchanging contact details and agreeing the best way to communicate
- Identifying a back-up contact for use in emergency situations when their designated mentor is unavailable.

Note: Different mentors may practice subtly different techniques during the rehabilitation process and therefore it is important that the mentee is supervised by one mentor wherever possible. Taking guidance from two mentors for the same species can be confusing and prevents the mentee from establishing a consistent approach to rehabilitation.

The Importance of Compatibility



We all have different personalities and relate to one another in different ways.

Because an effective mentor-mentee relationship is one forged on mutual respect and trust, it is important that both parties are broadly compatible.

It can be useful to take time at the end of a meeting or conversation to ask each other:

- Is the information we are sharing useful to each party?
- Is the manner in which we are sharing information useful?
- Am I/we sufficiently available for each other?
- Am I/we getting the most out of this relationship?
- Is there anything I/we could do differently to make this a stronger relationship?

The Importance of Training

New rehabilitators who have participated in training achieve better rehabilitation outcomes than those who do not.

It is therefore vitally important that mentors only enter into a relationship with a mentee who has acquired the underpinning knowledge to be successful under supervision. A mentee who has not participated in training will struggle to grasp the fundamental concepts of rehabilitation and much of the information conveyed to them by their mentor will be difficult to grasp.

Mentors should actively encourage their mentees to adopt a lifelong commitment to learning by participating in further training in a one-on-one setting with their mentor, or through attendance at facilitated workshops.

Similarly, for a mentor to be effective and maintain a contemporary understanding of best practice, they too should role model a commitment to learning by honing their skills and by sharing new insights with their mentee.

For the rehabilitation network as a whole to be effective, the mentor and mentee should actively strive for best practice and continuous improvement through knowledge and information sharing.



Photo credit Michael Eastwood

A Basic Mentoring Guideline

For the new rehabilitator, the process of receiving their first animal into care can be both daunting and formative. The steps taken by both the mentor and their mentee can have a significant bearing on the rehabilitation outcome and on the long-term engagement of the mentee.

Preparedness and adoption of a structured approach to the rehabilitation process is the key to a positive experience and this is where an effective mentor can make all the difference.

This basic guideline outlines the basic steps to be taken when embarking on the rehabilitation of a brush-tailed possum, Bennetts wallaby or Tasmanian pademelon joey.

Set Up and Preparation

Before accepting their first joey into care, the new rehabilitator must have a designated mentor, the appropriate equipment and suitable enclosures for every stage of the rehabilitation journey, from rescue to release. By thoroughly researching their species of choice, the new rehabilitator can anticipate the new animal's needs based on an understanding of:

- The animal's unique physical and biological characteristics including the species' developmental milestones.
- Any species-specific rehabilitation requirements (i.e. diet, husbandry, etc.)
- How to promote natural behaviour by reproducing as close to a natural environment as possible while the animal is in care.

Upon receiving their first joey, the new rehabilitator should seek the assistance of their mentor for:

- Conducting the initial assessment
- Ensuring suitability of enclosures and supplementary equipment (e.g. heat pad placement and settings, food and water bowls, etc.)
- Preparing oral hydration fluids, milk replacement formula, teat selection, etc
- Establishing a suitable feeding regime based on assessment of the animal's age and body condition.

Wherever possible, these initial steps are best facilitated in person at the place where the joey will be rehabilitated. This allows the mentor to ensure that their mentee has a solid understanding of basic techniques, providing them with a foundation upon which to learn and grow.

The First Feed

The first feed can be a trying experience for both the new rehabilitator and the new orphan. Ideally the mentor should be present to demonstrate and provide guidance on how to hold the joey, how to place the teat and encourage suckling.

The mentor should offer plenty of encouragement and reassurance that feeding will become easier with practice but should resist the urge to take over the feeding process. Following feeding, the mentor should provide a demonstration of the correct toileting technique and assist the mentee to refine the technique and build confidence.

At this stage it is useful to remind the mentee of any complications or barriers to feeding, including how to identify pain and discomfort as a result of injury, illness or a full bladder.

Finally, the mentor should demonstrate effective record keeping as a means of monitoring and detecting early warning signs that might indicate illness or disease. As record keeping is a requirement of the annual permit returns for the various tiers of rehabilitator, this is the time to engrain good practice in the mentee by establishing rigorous expectations for record keeping.

The Rest of Week One

The first week is usually the most difficult for the new rehabilitator and the new orphan. Experienced rehabilitators know from experience that this is typically when previously undetected issues come to the fore and things start to go wrong.

To mitigate the risk of complications passing undetected, the mentor should maintain regular contact with their mentee throughout the first week and consideration should be given to observing several daily feeds.

Similarly, records should be updated and shared with the mentor at least daily, with emphasis on inputs and outputs to ensure that the joey is thriving in its new surroundings.

Particular emphasis should be placed on:

- Feed type, quantities and frequency
- Toileting behaviour (quantities excreted, colour, form, etc.)
- Bodyweight and body condition
- Demeanour and behaviour.

Close monitoring during the first week allows the mentor to determine if the mentee and the orphan are an appropriate match and, if necessary, make alternate arrangements for animals with special needs – either temporarily or ongoing.

For animals experiencing health complications, mentors may need to provide direction to the mentee on referring the joey for veterinary assessment.

Two Weeks and Beyond

Ideally the mentor and mentee should connect face-to-face at least once during the second week to review the joey's progress and address any changes that need to be made to the care routine. From this point forward, the mentor should establish a schedule for future face-to-face contact, based on their assessment of the new rehabilitator's progress and the joey's needs.

Regular contact should be initiated by the mentor until the joey is thriving. Until then, contact should be regular enough to pick up on subtle changes in the joey and prevent them from becoming bigger welfare issues.



A Note on Feedback

Not all people are accustomed to receiving feedback and wildlife rehabilitation is complex and takes many years to master. With that in mind, mentors must be considered in their approach to providing feedback to their mentees; issues will inevitably arise and these should be viewed as opportunities for learning rather than failings on the part of the new rehabilitator.

Remember that even the most experienced rehabilitators make mistakes along the way and there is no such thing as a silly question; it is better to ask and learn than suffer the consequences for not having asked at all.

Some useful tips for providing feedback, include:

- Focus on the situation rather than the person
- Sandwich critical feedback between positive feedback
- Provide detailed recommendations on how to improve
- Be constructive in your feedback: refer to 'working towards becoming competent' rather than 'incompetent'
- Avoid appearing judgmental and invite questions and feedback on how you can better support the mentee.



It is important to be patient, provide encouragement and reassurance, and remember how difficult it was when you first began wildlife rehabilitation.

Checklist for Mentors & New Rehabilitators

The following checklist has been developed to assist with the initial stages of mentoring a new rehabilitator. It may be helpful to provide your mentee with a copy of this list.

 Checklist For Mentors of New Wildlife Rehabilitators Prior to receiving first joey (can be addressed without face-to-face contact)	
Construct suitable enclosures prior to receiving a joey (inside and outside)	
☐	Allows for natural behaviors
☐	Provides shelter
☐	Pre-release provides space to adequately prepare for survival post release
☐	All stages of development are addressed
Locate suitable release site (and an alternative in case it falls through)	
☐	Provides suitable habitat
☐	Limited risk of harm
☐	Has a population of that species present
☐	Understands that only wildlife that originates in the area should be released there
☐	Obtain all supplies needed (milk replacer, oral rehydration fluids etc.)
Understanding of natural behaviors for the species they intend to rehabilitate	
☐	Natural diet in wild
☐	Understanding of needs in captivity
☐	Understanding of zoonosis and the importance of quarantine and hygiene practices
☐	Understanding of the importance of reducing stress throughout rehabilitation
Upon receiving first joey (must be face-to-face)	
Conduct an initial assessment including:	
☐	Correctly sex a joey
☐	Weigh a joey (and measure the foot and tail if applicable)
☐	Inspect for injuries and parasites (treat with assistance)
☐	Assess body condition and demeanor (with assistance)
Assess for dehydration and undertake treatment (if necessary)	
☐	Ensure new rehabilitator understands different techniques for assessment
☐	Ensure new rehabilitator understands different techniques for treatment
☐	Ensure new rehabilitator has instructions on how to prepare oral rehydration fluid
☐	Evaluate enclosure set up and modify if necessary

Demonstrate appropriate temperature control
Develop care plans together, including:
☐ How much to feed and when
☐ How to transition to a new care plan
Correctly mix milk replacement formula (Wombaroo® is recommended)
Correct techniques for bottle feeding, including:
☐ Teat size and teat hole size
☐ When to replace teats
☐ Milk temperature
☐ Correct positioning of the body and joey
Demonstrate and assist new rehabilitator with toileting technique
☐ Undertake record keeping
☐ Demonstrate ways to provide sunlight on a daily basis
☐ Understanding of when to seek mentor assistance, and when and where to seek vet assistance
☐ Other aspects that may be of assistance
After the release of the first joey (may not require face-to-face)
Evaluate the entire process (focus on positive delivery)
☐ Discuss effectiveness of techniques
☐ Discuss effectiveness of enclosures
☐ Discuss what might be changed next time (if anything)
☐ Discuss any aspects that the new rehabilitator is unsure about
☐ Provide encouragement and positive feedback

Mentors Need Mentors Too

For experienced rehabilitators, a mentor serves as a sounding board upon which to test assumptions and obtain new perspectives. Partnering with a mentor helps to fuel lifelong learning and ensures a collaborative and consistent approach to mentoring more broadly.

Not only is it important for all mentors to learn from each other's experiences, both as mentors and as rehabilitators in their own right, it also helps to build a network: a community of experienced rehabilitators with the shared goal of empowering the next generation of rehabilitation carers.

